

Appropriations Committee testimony, on behalf of Commission on Children-2/18/09

By George Hensinger, PLTI Class of 2001, Norwalk, CT

My name is George Hensinger from Norwalk. I am 70 years old and retired 10 years from the computer industry- IBM; Honeywell and G.E.

In the year 2000, after five operations, two of which were life-threatening, I decided to spend my remaining years working to improve the well-being of CT's young children. I decided to be an advocate for improved preschool-age development, with extra emphasis on their social/emotional traits. I was seeing far too many young children growing up without empathy and consideration for others, and going on to commit horrendous crimes as young teenagers.

The question then was where to begin, with no formal background in the subject, other than two children and five grandchildren. That's when I discovered the Commission on Children's Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) in 2000, and it sounded just like what I needed- the tools to advocate for young children. I graduated in 2001, after my class project of recruiting seniors to volunteer, mentor and advocate for young children.

I sought out the local PLTI Alumni Assn., but there wasn't one, so I started one that continues to this day. As our first project, we provided parent volunteers to our local Discovery initiative to be trained as facilitators, and we conducted ten parent focus groups, including one in Spanish, to provide community parental input to the project. A number of us remained involved in Norwalk Kids Start Smart, our Discovery initiative. I co-chaired the Parent-engagement committee for the next four years and helped produce the Norwalk Resource Directory(300 pages) for parents, caregivers and advocates. The mayor has allowed us to make it available on the city website. I was then appointed by the mayor to the Norwalk Early Childhood Council, which is our combined Kids Start Smart, School Readiness and health collaborative.

I began my Early Childhood Development major at Norwalk Community College in 2001 and have since received my federal Child Development Associate certification, state certificate, and last May, my Associate's degree in Early Childhood Development (GPA 3.92). This is in addition to my Bachelor's degree in Business and Master's in Computers. I was also certified in a national preschool quality assessment program (ECERS).

The Salvation Army proclaims that they help mankind, one person at a time. I tried to do that by mentoring a fatherless boy for the last eight years, and I teach as a volunteer at Norwalk Community College's Early Childhood Lab Preschool for three and four year olds.

To advocate for children on a wider scale, I was one of the founders of CT Parent Power, a statewide organization of children's advocates, and remain active on the Steering and early Childhood committees.

I participate in over ten boards of directors, advisory committees, etc. of children's advocacy across the state, including the Early Care and Education and Achieve the Dream councils at Norwalk Community College; Mid-Fairfield Association for the Education of Young Children; the Care 4 Kids Advisory Council; the Early Childhood Alliance; CT Child Day Care Council; the preschool Quality Rating and Improvement System and Infant/Toddler subcommittees of the Early Childhood Cabinet; local and state Early Care Providers groups; etc.

All of this began with my PLTI training in 2000. It has opened the early childhood advocacy doors for me and over 2,000 other graduates, many of whom I serve with in my activities. It has been estimated that PLTI graduates have contributed 1,500,000 hours volunteering help to parents and children in CT.

I'm aware that there are many other beneficial aspects to Commission on Children that also attest to its value to the parents and children of CT, but I can speak most personally regarding PLTI. I understand that they more than cover their expenses with funds that they locate and direct to CT. Also, the Graustein Memorial Fund in Hamden matches all funds over \$250,000, up to a maximum of \$400,000. It would be unconscionable to leave those funds for children on the table.

As an active member of the more than 2,000 PLTI graduate alumni association, who are in the process of circulating a petition, I earnestly request that the Commission on Children be retained and permitted to continue its altruistic mission for the well-being of CT's future- the children. They continue to grow as we contemplate their support. We cannot afford to suspend it because it cannot be made up later.